THE ESSENTIALS OF CHOIR BOY TRAINING

WALTER HENRY HALL

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OF
CHOIR BOY TRAINING

BY

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THIS book is the outcome of a series of papers written for the NEW MUSIC REVIEW. It has been published in the present form in response to many requests from readers of the original papers.

At first sight it would seem that there are already works enough on the subject. The general condition of church music in America, however, has not yet reached that stage which may be said to render further suggestions superfluous. Besides, men see things from different standpoints, and a method of procedure which would be useful in one case might easily be found less "workable" in another. "Many men, many minds."

It will be noted that issue is taken with those who demand that head tones shall be used throughout the entire compass of the voice. The general law that it should be used "almost exclusively," as laid down in the first chapter, is afterwards considered from a wider standpoint. Unless possessed of a fine ear and ample time it is perhaps safer to adhere to the head-tone theory entirely, but with keen discrimination and a trained ear the results to be obtained by judicious blending of tones are incomparably greater.

Another point in which this book differs from others is the importance given to Interpretation. Stress has been laid on the necessity of a searching analysis of the *words* as well as the musical content. The climax of respectable dulness in many services is reached at the Anthem, whereas the inspiration

which comes from a subtle knowledge of the text would often vitalize a dull performance into a helpful ministration.

After all, it is just this idea of ministration that we all need to consider. To one man who requires help from a Method of Training there are fifty who need a higher sense of their responsibility as church musicians. Impelled, possibly, by a not unnatural desire to please their congregations, men are in danger of turning themselves into purveyors of Sunday entertainment, whereas their true function is as ministers of music.

The author will be glad if anything in this book shall help students in the art of choir training; he will be better pleased if some get more earnest views of their calling.

St. James' Church,
New York City.

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TRAINING CHOIR-BOYS

CHAPTER I

Introductory

At this late day it is difficult to write anything new on the subject of choir training. With few exceptions, however, the work of choir-masters would seem to indicate the need of an investigation on their part of methods of training, and an awakening in them of that due sense of responsibility which their work entails. The gifts of an ideal choir-master are many and various; it is doubtful if any one man possesses them all. There are certain fundamental requisites without which no one should attempt to train a choir; a correct method of training boys' voices; adequate musical knowledge, and devotion to the work for the work's sake. With these qualifications a good start is assured.

The devotion may generally be counted on, as, without it, few would endure the labor involved, or exercise the patience required in training boys. In many instances, also, there is adequate musical knowledge; and yet without the first requisite the other two are of little avail. The truth of this is constantly being exhibited in our churches by the failure of many otherwise excellent musicians, who upon the strength of their *general* musicianship endeavor to train a choir of boys; the results prove alike the earnestness and the uselessness of their efforts.

Hand in hand with general musical equipment, such as theoretical knowledge and organ playing, the successful choir-master must learn to produce properly the singing quality of a boy's voice.

Here the difficulties commence. It is comparatively easy to find teachers for organ playing and theory, but how is the student to acquire that prime necessity, the ability to teach boys to sing. The young organist who is called upon to train a choir of boys is confronted with a serious proposition. He hears a constant wrangling between the various advocates of this or that method; of "head" and "chest" tones; of the "natural" and "acquired" voice, until in distraction, he frequently ignores all theories and contents himself with drilling his choir in the music for the Sunday services. What is the conscientious student to do?

It has been demonstrated over and over again that the child voice should be confined almost throughout its entire compass to the "thin" or "head" register. Apart from scientific proof, which is easily obtainable but outside the scope of this book, it is sufficient to say that the finest choirs in the world are trained on this principle. It would be too much to say that this register should be used *exclusively*, but it should be so blended into the lower mixed tones that when boys are singing together the transition should be imperceptible, even to the choir-master himself; when this blend is obtained, for all practical purposes, the voice used *is* of one continuous "thin" quality.*

The system of training the head voice has been strongly opposed. It is sometimes said that the *natural*, robust quality is changed to one that is false and effeminate; but it must be remembered that only *acquired* characteristics are changed;

* See Chapter V.

characteristics acquired by bad usage; by typical public school singing; by boisterous street play, or by association with untrained or ill-trained singers. Instead, therefore, of the voice being *changed* it is *restored*.

It is also urged that singing with the "thin" register necessitates a weak tone. This cannot be denied when the chest voice is first eliminated. But in skillful hands, the development of the pure quality which supplants the other can be accomplished with surprising rapidity. If, with the development of the tone, power is still absent, much is proved against the choir-master, but nothing against the system.

This method of training is also condemned because of the alleged difficulty of combining with it good pronunciation. This is a serious objection, if true; and that it is raised at all is probably due to the men who regard *tone* not only the Alpha, but also the Omega of choir training, and sacrifice everything else to it. But do boys who sing with other methods pronounce any better? Indeed, is it not possible to hear eminent soloists, to say nothing of mixed choirs, without being able to discover whether they are singing in any language whatsoever?

The objection, however, which at first sight appears to have some weight because it sounds scientific, is that as there are three or more registers in the adult voice there must be a like series in the voice of the child. But the size, pliability, and general condition of the child's larynx, forbid such a comparison.

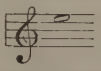
It is not denied that the voices of many children consist of two or more series of tones. As will be seen in another chapter, the writer believes that many voices can be trained better by proper division than by adherence to one series. Nevertheless, the *effect* must be of one complete pure register.

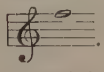
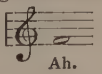
CHAPTER II

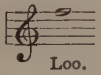
Choice of Voices — First Sounds

The choice of voices is of great importance. Perhaps equal experience is needed in the selection as in the training of choristers. The opportunities for selection vary according to locality, climate, nationality of parentage, and general environment, but given a certain number of boys there will be found different well-defined types of voices.

The first inclination is to choose only such boys as naturally possess a sweet, pure quality. Indeed, some eminent English choir-masters publish such advice as "reject all rough, coarse voices," "take care to refuse all those in whom the lower, thick register is forced up too high"; this last is followed by the statement, "it may be asserted that such a production can rarely be cured." Such advice, if followed in this country, would have excluded from our best choirs a large majority of the most efficient choristers, whose rough, coarse quality ceased with the elimination of the so-called chest register. When the process is understood, this is one of the simplest problems to confront the choir-master; in fact, the writer has yet to reject a boy on the ground of a forced-up chest tone. The voices to be rejected are pinched, thin, and tight ones; those with a strong nasal twang; and the sharp, hard variety with a thread-like streak running through. Unless the choice is extremely limited, exclude all such. Sometimes a boy will be found with a promising voice, but which stops absolutely at a certain note.

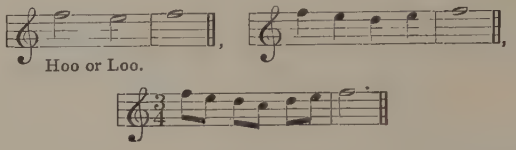
By all means give him a trial. Such a one was recently brought to me by a choir-master, who had ineffectually tried to increase the range. On examination, the boy sang with a pure quality up to  and then stopped short, apparently unable to utter any sound beyond. On striking the high B flat, and asking him to sing it, he did so with ease, but only with the lightest tone. This tone was brought down to the note on which he failed before, and in less than a month the entire range blended easily and evenly. Incidentally, the fact that the lower notes of the boy were head tones and not chest, proves that in some voices even the head register has its divisions. More will be said about this in another chapter. Other things being equal, choose an intelligent, sturdily built boy, with a nervous, sanguine temperament. This temperament may get him into mischief, and will certainly give the choir-master scope for judicious management, but his type is always a *worker*.

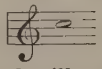
The boys having been selected, give them an object lesson furnished by themselves; let them sing together, *loudly*, in a comparatively low key, some familiar hymn. Most of them will do so with their untrained, coarse voice. Then ask them to sing *softly*, to the syllable "loo," the note  . Almost all will produce this with the pure quality. Explain to the class, as simply as possible, that nearly all boys use two qualities of tone, one of which is bad and by use will get worse; the other, the true tone which, albeit weak, can be developed into beauty as well as power. In order firmly to establish this tone in their mind, let them, separately and together, alternately sing first a chest and then a head tone, using 

for the former, and 

for the latter. The boys and not the

teacher should indicate the right tone. The correct way of singing the one note having been secured, extend the range downwards, adding one note at a time; thus:



Care must be taken to keep the lips apart and the throat relaxed whilst singing the vowel indicated above. These exercises should be transposed lower by semitones, but it would be advisable to make the limit until the upper notes are well under control. Below  the coarse quality will be more difficult to suppress, and still softer tone must be insisted upon. Here each boy must be tried separately; so soon as the break is reached, return to the higher notes where the tone is correct, and repeat the directions from the beginning. If patience and tact are used, a surprisingly short time will suffice to insure an even tone throughout the entire compass.

The vowel suggested for this series of exercises is "oo," as in "moon," but it cannot be urged too strongly that it must not be misapplied. Its persistent use by choir-masters is responsible in large measure for the hooting, false, and colorless tone prevalent in many choirs. Without great care it will also tend to tighten the throat. Its chief value is in eliminating rough tone, but it is practically useless for the after development of the voice. It merely lays the foundation for future work.

CHAPTER III

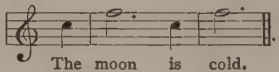
Tone Development Through Vowels

Pure tone having been acquired on the vowel sound *oo*, the work must proceed until all the vowels are alike well sung. This is an undertaking of some magnitude, yet too much stress cannot be laid on its importance. All vocal teachers worthy the name are alert to emphasize the importance of vowel practice ; trainers of boys' voices alone seem to consider the use of one, or possibly two vowel sounds, sufficient. The exceptions are lamentably rare. This statement finds curious corroboration in the work of some of the best choirs in America, where a critical listener can detect a particular vowel sound which dominates the general tone. This general tone varies with different choirs, but few choir-masters seem to be without their pet working-vowel. One will overwork *oo*, another *ah*, and another, though more seldom, *ē*. So wedded to a special sound are most of our men, that all their work takes to itself a certain definite color, which may be distinctly recognized wherever it is heard, and traced to its author. Now, no matter how smooth, or brilliant, or beautiful, the quality may be, *any* tone which constantly permeates a choir is bound to become wearisome to the ear. This being so, it should be the aim of all choir-masters so to equalize the vowels that no one sound shall prevail to the exclusion of others.

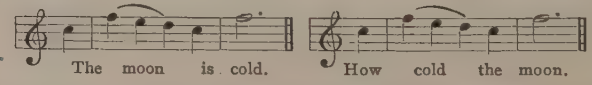
It must be clearly understood, however, that change of vowel quality must not include a change of production, the pure head

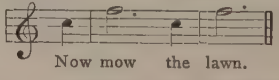
tone must be sacrificed for nothing. It is quite possible to preserve that without adhering to a monotonous tone color.

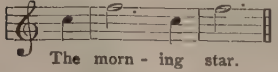
The first step is to merge the tone already obtained, *oo*, into those other vowel sounds which are most easily formed in the thin register. It being difficult to keep the willing attention of boys in matter-of-fact exercises, a plan is here suggested to insure their coöperation. It is to devise sentences which contain the vowel sounds required. Development of this simple principle will transform the most tedious theory into practice at once interesting and sure in results.

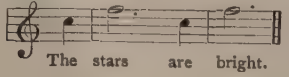
The first sounds to follow *oo*, should be, respectively, *o*, *aw*, *ah*, and *i*. The utmost care must be taken to preserve the thin register, and *the importance of soft singing cannot be over-estimated.* As *oo* is already obtained, that must be the basic tone from which to start the sentence, and the next sound in order added; thus 

. . Moon contains *oo*, and cold *o*. After transposing the exercise lower by semitones until the present limit of the thin register is reached, return and change the sentence around, making it, "How cold the moon," descending as before. Then with the same words, change the exercise to



Proceeding to the next sound, a word with *aw* must be introduced, as, 

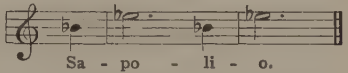
and its reverse, "The lawn now mow." Descend by semitones, and vary the exercise, as before. Follow by a sentence which contains *ah*, as 

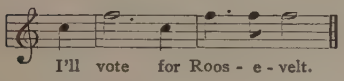
and "The star of morn." And lastly, 

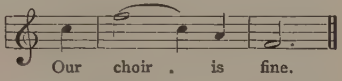
and "How bright the stars."

It will be observed that the first principal vowel in each sentence was the last in the preceding one.

The choir-master can exercise his ingenuity in finding sentences which will interest his particular class of boys. Current topics of interest, popular advertisements, politics, all can be drafted into the general plan of teaching children great principles in pleasant fashion. Many boys have simultaneously amused themselves and developed their voices whilst singing such words and sentences as







So far, only those vowel sounds have been discussed, which, more or less easily, can be sung with correct tone. In the next chapter the subject will be continued, and the more difficult vowels considered.

CHAPTER IV

Tone Development Through Vowels (Continued)

After practice on those vowel sounds which most easily secure pure tone, that is, *oo*, *o*, *aw*, *ah*, and *i*, as discussed in the last chapter, work must be commenced on the other sounds, which, although more difficult to use, are no less important.

Following the principle already laid down, exercises must be devised which contain these other vowel sounds.

First use a sentence with the word "bell" in it, as "The bell doth sound." In singing this short *e*, keep the jaw well down, and see that no sound of *l* is heard until the very end of the tone, when it must vanish as soon as it is sounded. No movement of lips, mouth, or throat must be permitted. The only movement necessary to finish most words ending in *l* is a slight raising of the tip of the tongue. The observance of this simple rule will entirely prevent the vicious and prevalent habit of changing such words into two syllables, as be-ll, sti-ull, hai-ul.

The correct use of the vowel sound in "bell" is the best possible preparation for the difficult long as in "day." Indeed, when one is properly sung, the other follows naturally, provided due caution is observed against nasal tone, which this sound sometimes induces. The sentence "The day is done" will provide an exercise which can be sung almost exactly like "The bell doth sound," excepting that the teeth should be somewhat wider apart on "day" than on "bell." The final consonant must not be dwelt upon, but sounded and finished almost simul-

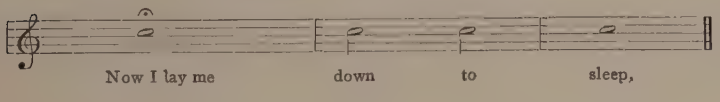
taneously. This sudden release will prevent the possibility of turning this type of word into two syllables, as day-ee, may-ee.

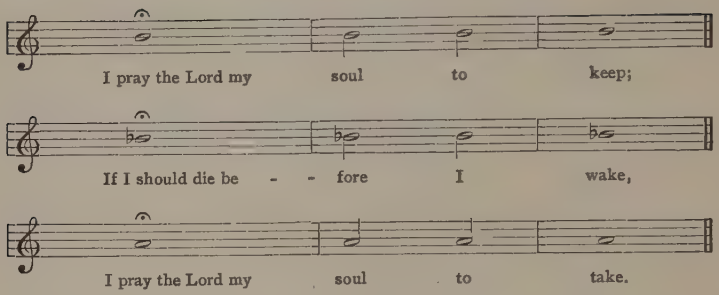
Usually, the most difficult of all the vowels is long *ē*. See that the teeth are not closed, and get the boys to imagine that the tone is low in the throat. This will tend to avert the tight, biting quality which often seems to accompany the effort to pronounce this vowel properly. The French *u* as in plume, or German *u* as in müde can be utilized in this connection, for their correct pronunciation, especially on high notes, will secure just the tone required. The lips must be held loosely, with no indications of contraction or stiffness.

Similar to *ē* is the short *i* as in "wind." When *ē* is mastered, little difficulty will be experienced in this, and sentences should be used which combine the two sounds, such as "The wind is bleak," "How bleak the wind." If correctly sung, the vowel sound of "wind" and "bleak" will be quite similar.

Short *a* as in "man" is another vowel which is often provocative of nasal tone. The best way to guard against this is to open the mouth as if singing the broad *a*, as in "father," and then to modify the tone merely by movement of the tongue. It is vastly better to err in the direction of the broad *a*, than towards the twang which not seldom follows the attempt to pronounce this phonetically.

After practice on individual sounds, all must be blended together. No finer exercise for the purpose can be obtained than the old nursery prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep." Let it be sung slowly and deliberately, with expression, and with a different note for each line, in the following form:





In the first line there are five vowel sounds ; in the second, seven ; in the third, six ; and in the last, seven, and the open *ah* occurs not at all. A simple accompaniment, somewhat suggestive of the meaning of the words, should be added by the choir-master.

Unless for some special effect, see that during a sustained note the opening of the mouth remains the same. Whenever it changes, a different quality of tone results, and it is better to obtain one definite tone color at a time, so that the concentration of the boys be not disturbed.

If the principal sounds are carefully taught in the manner indicated, there should be little difficulty in securing not only good pronunciation, but also an even blend of voice. Yet constant vigilance is necessary. The choir-master must study his choir much as a physician does his patients. When the tone shows signs of shrillness, correct it by exercises containing allopathic doses of *oo ;* when it is colorless, treat with homœopathic tincture of *e ;* if weak, build up by a generous tonic in the shape of vocalizes on the broad *ah*. This ceaseless watching is a heavy price to pay, but the results amply justify it.

CHAPTER V

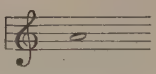
Tone Blending

In the first chapter it was said that the head tone should be imperceptibly blended into the lower mixed register. This implies an opposition to the much advocated theory that a properly trained boy should sing with a head tone throughout his entire range. The writer confesses that for some years he inclined to this popular idea, but subsequent experience has resulted in the belief that it is misleading. The blend may be so excellent as to defy recognition in chorus singing, but on examination the trained ear can readily detect that all the notes are not formed alike. The skill of the choir-master may, and often does, unite the entire compass in a series of notes apparently made in the same pattern, but this does not prove that the same kind of production is used, but only that the choir-master is expert in his art of blending tones.

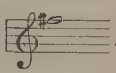
Now, this very skill, praiseworthy as it is, is often the means of throwing the inexperienced man off the track, especially in view of the unthinking talk about "head" tones and "thin" register which he is constantly hearing. He naturally infers that if the boys of an eminent choir produce all their tones with the head voice, he, if he would do his work well, must insist upon the same production. He does not always remember, indeed he usually does not know, that what he thinks is one series of tones is the artful welding together of two, and more often of three. In actual work in his choir-room many varieties of tone

will reach him, the exact nature of which he cannot decide upon. Having fortified himself with the determination to exclude all but the notes of the so-called "thin" register, he is often confronted with a break amongst the head tones themselves, about or sometimes a semitone higher; the notes immediately above and below may be of equal purity, yet unmistakably different. Which are head tones?

Then again, boys will be found with a naturally beautiful quality of tone about

or 

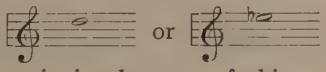
which undoubtedly differs from the ring of a note a few tones higher. Must this tone, if it blend well with the rest of the voice, be substituted for one of inferior quality? This would seem to be running a theory to death.

First as to head tones. In all the various choir-manuals written by church musicians which have come under the writer's observation, he has failed to see any reference to what he believes to be a vital point, namely, the division of the so-called head tones into two different series, and this notwithstanding the fact that reputable voice teachers and laryngoscopists almost invariably recognize it. It is a common experience to find a boy possessing a voice of pure quality, with a decided break on about  . If all these notes are in the prescribed thin register, why the break? This question, which must have forced itself upon many choir-masters, can only be satisfactorily answered by admitting either the presence of two series of head tones, or of an upper medium range. The practical value of this will be readily understood when it is remembered that the

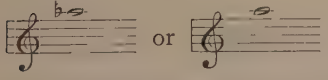
usual criticism of choirs trained in the head register is that they are all "top." Brilliance on high notes is desirable, but can never atone for weak middle notes, where tone is more frequently needed.

It must not be supposed that choir-trainers are advised to go out of their way to find this break. Often it is unobservable, in which cases all that is necessary is to broaden the tone as it descends, taking care to preserve the pure quality as it becomes fuller and rounder in the descent. When the break shows badly, begin on the highest thin notes, and bring them down to it, letting them overlap the second series for two or three notes. In order to obtain the notes of the second series, make the boys distend the back of the mouth as wide as possible, and imagine a deep cavity which they must fill with tone. Perfect suppleness of the parts must be insisted upon, or throatiness may ensue. Avoid "oo" or kindred sounds, using "Ah" and "Aw."

The subject of this chapter is difficult to set down on paper, but practical demonstration of it is easy. If proof of the correctness of the theory advocated is desired, let the choir-master cause his boys to sing with a pure tone and full voice

 or

to Ah, and repeat it in the same fashion; then give them

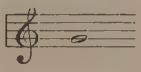
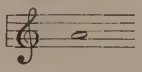
 on the same vowel. Most of the boys will experience with each note a totally different physical sensation. In the lower note the whole mouth and ears will, so to speak, buzz with sound, and with the higher note the forehead or top of the head will experience the same sensation. It will vary in intensity with different boys, but all will feel it in some degree.

It may be thought that this chapter contradicts the first, which stated that "the child-voice should be confined almost exclusively to the 'thin' or 'head' register." It is only an apparent contradiction. That statement was made without qualification, in order that the preliminary work of differentiating between "chest" and "head" tones should be unaffected by side issues. The first work can be accomplished regardless of the more subtle differences.

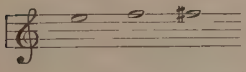
CHAPTER VI

Tone Blending (Continued)

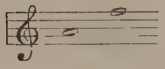
In the last chapter it was said that "the break which is frequently found in the thin register indicates either the presence of two series of head tones, or of an upper medium range." This requires further consideration. It does not necessarily follow that these two series belong to different registers. Theorists may fight that out amongst themselves. This little book being neither scientific nor controversial, but merely practical, simply states the fact that the upper voice of most boys,

above  or 

should have two carefully concealed divisions. The break in this upper voice varies much more in the child-voice than in that of an adult. Whilst it is usually noticed about

 it may be found as high as G or as low as D.

As already stated, this break is often unobservable. It may be said further that in many voices it is not present. Why, then, it may be asked, is so much stress laid upon it? Because, as the notes of the second series are broadened and strengthened, those above are apt to become unreliable unless attention is given to their proper placing; on the other hand, if the upper thin notes are brought all the way down, power and fullness will be absent where they are most required.

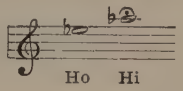
The importance of this division of the upper voice can hardly be over-estimated. If one first considers how rare it is to find in this country a choir possessing a full, flooding tone between

and then remembers how often the weak middle notes are capped by piercing brilliancy on the high notes, some realization of the truth must be apparent.

Pliability of the child-larynx is responsible for the variable position of the break under discussion, and also accounts for the ease with which the young voice responds to the various systems of training, both good and bad. Without this pliability the barbarous forcing up of the thick register, which used to be common and which still may be heard, especially in public and Sunday schools, would be impossible. It also becomes an undesirable factor in the dual upper voice in the hands of most choir-masters who, not recognizing the subtle difference between the two series of tones, treat them as one.

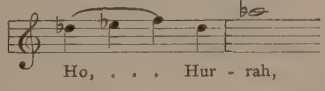
It has been stated over and over again, *ad nauseam*, that when the pure quality is used, power, certainly in the middle of the voice, must not be expected; that one must choose between an ethereal, colorless tone, and a noisy, strident one. This statement has received apparent vindication through the singing of many otherwise excellent choirs. It is here opposed. There is absolutely no reason why this most used, and therefore most important, part of the voice should be robbed of power, in order to obtain a limited number of exceptionally high notes. These will not suffer, but the lower ones will gain by the intelligent cultivation of each series.

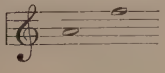
This cultivation must be accomplished by direct appeal to the boys themselves. As a rule, it is unwise to explain to them any theory of the voice, but in this case good results can

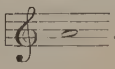
be more quickly brought about by giving them some inkling of what is desired. This exercise will serve,

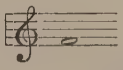
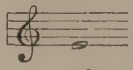
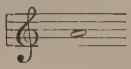
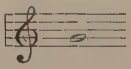


Explain that a full, big tone is wanted on the first note, then, after breathing, a thinner, more pointed tone, directed higher in the head, on the next note. As suggested before, the boys are required to notice the different physical sensations caused by the different resonance of each sound. Most boys will instantly do so, and will impart the knowledge thus gained in language much more to the point than that used by the teacher in his explanations. It will be well to fix on some short, definite direction which can be readily understood when this tone is required. Anything will do which conveys the right idea. Perhaps the most simple is "thin edge," which can be quickly said just before the attack of a note of the first series. Having once obtained this production, exercises must be devised to fix it, as

After the difference is well established, dispense with the rest before the top note, as

It cannot be emphasized too much that the quality of the second series must be of a like purity with the first. The pattern must be similar, except for greater fullness and volume. The tone now, instead of vibrating high in the head, must appear to fill the whole mouth. This is a pretty sure indication that the production is right. Power can be added by regulation vocalizes on some open vowel, preferably "Ah," or "Aw," on the notes between



Perhaps the most troublesome part of the child-voice to train is that below  . Here is where the thick or chest-register especially asserts itself. It goes without saying that the rough, coarse tone which is found hereabouts must be eliminated. But what is to take its place? If a weak, ineffective tone be considered satisfactory, the head voice may be extended to the lowest notes. In some isolated instances this may be done with a moderate degree of success, but the result is usually disappointing.

A good working rule is to carry down the thin quality *as low as it remains serviceable*, and then blend it into the mixed tone below. As voices vary, all boys will not experience the change on the same note. Some will carry down an excellent tone as low as  or even  and others will lose their effectiveness at  or  . But wherever the point of change is reached, the first care must be to prevent coarse tone. The great value of the previous work on the upper voice, however, will be felt here, for it will unconsciously have influenced this lower register, so that little difficulty will be experienced. Instead of the thick tone, there will usually be found a good, pure quality, albeit not of the same variety as that called "head tones." This should be softened and blended with the second series in such manner as imperceptibly to unite them. For this purpose the use of "oo" down the scale of C is beneficial. After practice with this vowel has made the scale smooth and even, substitute "Ah," carefully preserving the quality and opening the tone in the descent. The blend will be all the better and the tone

more solid, because of the difference in the note at which boys change.

As soon as an even tone is established on descending scale passages, reverse the form of exercise by work on ascending scales. Commence softly and increase the power as the pitch rises. The blend must be perfect and the quality of each note as similar as possible, so that all ideas of registers and theories may be forgotten in the general ensemble.

When the voice is thus trained, a proper balance between the boys and men results. The tone is continuous, from the highest notes of the trebles to the lowest notes of the basses. Balance is destroyed if to the voices of men is added merely a thin, piping soprano part. It is as inartistic as a constant combination of flutes and 'cellos would be. Choir-training and sound musical taste must go hand in hand.

CHAPTER VII

Pronunciation and Enunciation. Vowel Sounds

Without good articulation the most beautiful quality of tone avails but little. Aesthetic appreciation of tone quality is granted to but few, whilst all normal ears recognize distinct utterance.

In a good choir tone quality and distinctness of utterance must be combined. Sir John Stainer, with a cynicism which was rare with him, once suggested that songs might be sung to some vowel sound, and the words recited by an elocutionist. Such satire might well be directed against much choir-singing.

Most of the manuals on Pronunciation and Enunciation carry the young student through such a labyrinth of details as to bewilder him. Such manuals are excellent for those who have time for them. A few salient points and suggestions, enough to allow a working basis, will be given here.

First, as to vowel sounds. There are certain principal ones, the long and the short, as follows:

Seven Long Vowel Sounds

ee, as in meet,
ai, as in gate,
er, as in search,
ah, as in far,
aw, as in awe,
oh, as in no,
oo, as in lose.

These are all modifications or shadings of "Ah." Three must be secured by the use of the lips, three by movement of the

tongue. With "Ah" the mouth will be well opened, and the tongue down. As "aw," "oh," and "oo" are sung, the lips will be drawn closer together. Thus will be seen why "oo" is so distinctly a closed vowel. Undue closing of the lips, as in whistling, must be guarded against. The tone must have room for its emission.

As "er," "ai," and "ee" are sung, the tongue will gradually raise, and a smiling *position* (without a smile) be assumed.

Six Short Vowel Sounds

ĭ, as in sin,
ĕ, as in wet,
ă, as in sad,
ŏ, as in hot,
ŭ, as in nut,
o͝o, as in good.

To secure these properly, the throat must be well opened at the back.

Long and Short Vowel Sounds Compared

ē and ĭ, as in meet, sin.

Ē is the thinnest vowel sound. It must not be unduly thin, or the jaw will stiffen, and the tone become reedy. Upon high notes the tone may be shaded into ĭ, when the tongue will not press so tightly on the roof of the mouth.

ā and ĕ, as in gate, wet.

Absolute correctness for the pronunciation of "ā" involves a dual sound: the ā, and a "finish" or "vanish" on ĭ. This must never degenerate into anything like "ga-eet." On high notes the ā may be shaded into ĕ with good tonal results. In both cases the "vanish" must begin and finish instantaneously, and must be made with the tongue alone.

Ah and **Ă**, as in far and sad.

With many vocal teachers, especially Italians, "Ah" is the most used (if not abused) vowel of all.

For American boys it is not usually valuable until the pure tone is well placed, when it becomes worthy of its reputation. Without preliminary training on "oo," "oh," and "aw," our boys generally place "Ah" too far back in the throat. It should lean somewhat in the direction of "aw."

The ă as in "sad" is liable to give trouble, and must usually merge slightly into a broader sound, yet never to the point of singing such a word as "thank" to "tharnk," as may often be heard.

aw and **ŏ**, as in awe and hot.

These sounds usually give but little trouble. Their *difference*, however, is essential. "God" must not be "Gawd."

ō and **ŭ**, as in no and nut.

The long ō is released by a slightly modified sound which resembles "oo." This must be effected with the lips only. The short ŭ, as in "nut," must be well away from "aw" in such words as "tongue," "none," "once."

ōō, and **ŏŏ**, as in lose, good.

The value of these sounds in changing rough tone to pure has been stated several times in the course of this book. It only remains to emphasize the need of a careful distinction between the two sounds. Their similarity is most conducive to indistinct articulation. Such words as "fool," "full," "dull," require different shading.

Four Diphthong Sounds

ī, as in guide,
oi, as in joy,
ou, as in now,
ew, as in few.

Each of the above consists of two sounds, as follows :

ī, of ah-ee or ah-ĭ,
oi, of aw-ee, or aw-ĭ,
ou, of ah-o͝o,
eu, of e-o͞o.

In the first three, the stress is on the first sound; in the last, on the second. This can readily be seen by sustaining the words, "guide," "joy," and "now," the vanish "ee," "ĭ," and "oo," merely finishing the sound begun by "ah," "oi," and "ow."

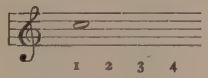
With the "eu" it is different, the stress being on the second sound, as "fe-*oo*."

This vocal sound receives but scant recognition. Such words as "dew," "new," "tune," frequently suffer from the omission of the initial vowel sound, and are pronounced "doo," "noo," "toon."

Boys will readily see and correct this fault by seeing it from an absurd standpoint, as being told that in certain churches "poos" are not rented. Mere statement of the principle does not seem sufficient.

It will be found that when the letter "r" precedes such words, the initial sound of "ee" is not used, as "rule," "grew," "true."

Not only the four regular diphthong sounds, but also those others of a like character, as and ō, should be taught by special drill. The boys should be required to sing sustained notes, such as



Eye.....Ah..... ĭ
Lie .....Lah ..... ĭ
Die .....Dah..... ĭ

To secure precision, the choir-master should beat time, and insist that every boy commence and release the "vanish" together. Every dual sound should alike receive this special drill. The golden rule for such drill must be "take and release the 'vanish' simultaneously."

CHAPTER VIII

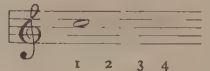
Pronunciation and Enunciation. Consonants

Important as vowel sounds are, it is, after all, the consonants which give life to singing. Richard Grant White says that "man might well be called a consonant-using animal. He alone of all animals uses consonants. It is the consonant which makes the chief difference between the cries of beasts and the speech of man."

If ideas are to be conveyed, — and that is the function of song as well as of speech, — then consonants must be pronounced clearly. Their study should be delayed until good tone is definitely placed, otherwise the change of position required by them will destroy tone quality.

If the tone quality is properly placed, it will, so to speak, *recover itself* automatically and instantly from the momentary disturbance caused by the use of the consonant.

This "momentary disturbance" must occur but for a flash of time. Exercises similar to those used in securing a proper "vanish" should be used; for instance,



Not.....Nŏ..... t

Lord....Lau..... rd

As before, the choir-master will beat time, and see that each boy begins and finishes the final consonants together. An explosive or puffy finish must be avoided.

The letter "r" is both abused and neglected. "Faw run to us," "Hosanner in the highest," are common faults, and, in a lesser degree, so are "Lawd" for Lord, "feah" for fear. The careless manipulation of this letter is responsible for more lapses from clear enunciation than might be supposed. Its use and abuse should be carefully noticed; its many and varied phases will open up an instructive study. Different conditions will necessitate different treatment of this most elastic and elusive letter.

Final g's and s's must be carefully sounded, but the sibilant should be softened as much as possible.

Sustained notes must invariably be held to the vowel sound, and the final consonants approached and released on the instant.

Words ending in "ll," as "hill," "fill," need special attention, in order to prevent a double syllable. The same caution is needed in words like "fire," "mire."

In such words as "Trinity," "Charity," "Unity," the middle syllable "i" must be pronounced like i in "hit," and not as if it were spelled "er."

The word "to" is rarely sung well, as in "to keep this law."

Instances might be multiplied indefinitely, but sufficient has been said to show the need of more attention to this phase of choir work.

Our language does not lend itself readily to musical treatment. Furthermore, it is quite possible to hear the same word pronounced with six different vowel shadings by six equally cultivated people. It is the choir-master's province to differentiate between these subtle qualities, to train his ear to an appreciation of the most refined pronunciation, and to teach his choir accordingly. To this end he must first submit his own speech to the test. If his own tongue lack refinement, he must expect nothing better from his choir.

CHAPTER IX

Breathing

A much neglected branch of choir work is that of proper breathing. Correct habits in this direction should be taught simultaneously with voice production, the exercises being few and simple, with no attempt at scientific explanation.

The lungs of boys being comparatively small and undeveloped, less power of sustaining long passages must be expected, and more frequent breathing allowed, than with adults. Proper exercises will invariably increase the lung capacity, and will often enable a boy closely to rival mature singers in sustaining power. The control of breath exhibited by many boys in diving proves to what extent children's lungs may be developed. Half the battle is gained with proper position. Let the boys stand squarely on both feet, with body erect but comfortable, thumbs at the waist, and hands towards the back. Before breathing, two faults must be guarded against, which are, raising the shoulders, and drawing in the abdomen. An excellent expedient for avoiding the first fault is that of causing the boys to place the tips of their fingers under the choir desks, or under a table; if there is a *pull* on the fingers during inspiration, the shoulders are being raised. Drawing in the abdomen may be prevented by imagining a light rubber band around the waist, kept steady. Standing in the position outlined above, the boys must be directed to take a deep breath, with lightly closed mouth, as if smelling a flower. This breath must be held

steadily for a few seconds, and then slowly exhaled. During the exhalation, strict attention must be given to the chest, which must remain firm, and only allowed to relax at the end of the breath.

By a "deep breath," an undue supply is not meant. The direction so frequently given to children, "take a good, big breath," is unwise, and defeats the object in view. Fatigue, and tightening of the throat and jaw, will result. What to do with the breath is as important as how to take it. A proper position of the body will usually insure sufficient breath for ordinary phrases.

Breathing, according to the directions here given, should first be practiced without vocal sound, both inhalation and exhalation being slow and deliberate. As soon as the principle is understood and mastered, increase the speed of the inhalation, still maintaining complete control over the exhalation. Then vocalize a note to "Ah," exercising the same control as before. Next take a single chant, in moderate time, and have it sung in one breath to the numerals, as

See that no breath is taken after the first part of the chant. This may be followed by exercises on sustained tones, first without, and then with, a crescendo and diminuendo.

Watch the boys constantly to see that their shoulders are not raised during breath-taking, nor their chests relaxed during breath-use.

Sometimes there will not be sufficient time to take a full breath, as, for instance, in the middle of long runs. A short, sudden inspiration, called a "half-breath," is then necessary.

It is obtained by a quick, outward pressure against the imaginary band around the waist.

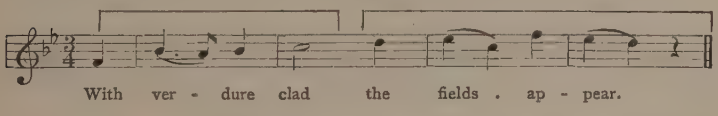
It cannot be too strongly insisted that, during the act of singing, only the body below the larynx must be tense and firm; the throat, tongue, and jaw perfectly free.

CHAPTER X

Phrasing

The true sense of a musical idea will sometimes demand more breath than can be obtained by one inspiration, when it becomes necessary to divide or subdivide the idea by making its parts conform to the exigencies of breathing. The exact places for such divisions are sometimes open to discussion, but for general guidance certain rules can be given. Some of these are so obvious that mention of them would not be necessary were they not being constantly broken by reputable choirs. The average choir-boy, regardless of musical plan or textual sense, breathes only when physically compelled to do so.

As far as possible the relation between the musical phrase and the text must be preserved. Where this can be done, no difficulty presents itself. For instance,



This illustration naturally divides itself into two half-phrases, between which breath may be taken. But sometimes the word-phrase will overlap the musical phrase, in which case it is usual to sacrifice the music. Examples of this may be found in the hymn "Lead, kindly light," set to Dykes' well-known tune. Here it would be useless to follow any set musical phrases; the corresponding lines of the three verses require different phras-

ing in each case. The sense of the words demands free treatment of the musical phrase. The following, however, are positive rules:

AVOID BREATHING

Between an Article and a Noun. Who has not heard, "We acknowledge Thee to be the (breath) Lord," when "Lord" has been set to a high note?

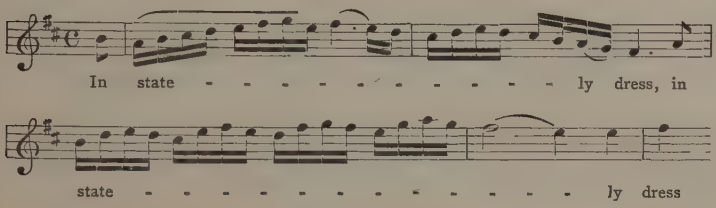
Between an Adjective and a Noun. Perhaps the worst infraction of this rule is the response, "And take not Thy Holy (breath) Spirit from us." In American choirs it would seem to be an almost universal habit to breathe after "Holy." This opportunity of protesting against it is gladly welcomed. (The force of this criticism is not diminished if it be argued that in this case "Holy Spirit" may be considered as a compound noun.)

After a Preposition, as, "and come before His presence with (breath) a song."

It is seldom good to take breath on an unresolved dissonance; wait until its resolution.

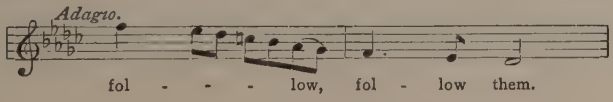
In long, florid runs, such as are found in the older masters, division by breathing is permissible. They were formerly sung by men, whose perfect breath control made such division unnecessary. Greater breadth of phrasing than is now generally possible was the result. When breath is required, avoid taking it before a primary accent; between the seventh and eighth degrees of the scale; and, if possible, wait until the form or direction of the run changes. Where the choir is large enough, a still better plan is to divide the voices into two parts, causing the parts to breathe at different places. Thus the passage will be unbroken, and greater steadiness assured.

Another valuable device is obtained by repeating the words, in order to obtain breath. When practicable, this is the most satisfactory plan. A well-known instance of this expedient is that from the "Creation."



In the original the whole passage is written to the word "stately." The repetition of the words as indicated eliminates the difficulty.

This may be successfully used in music of a different character, where great sustaining power is required. In Spohr's "Blest are the departed," the repetition of the word "follow" makes it possible for a boy to sing as slowly and sustained as necessary:



CHAPTER XI

Interpretation — Expression

Expression, as applied to the interpretation of music, is a well-worn term, yet it is rarely given the attention its importance warrants. It is usually either ignored or degraded. On the one hand are men, devoted to church traditions, who constantly repress their musical fancy lest it antagonize what they conceive to be church style. On the other side are a set of mere musical enthusiasts, having no sympathy at all with such a style, and bent solely on producing effects. Of the members of the former it may be said that much legitimate success is denied them by reason of the narrowing influences under which they work.

It is by no means advocated that such men should allow themselves to forsake their ideals for a possible cheap success. No popularity which comes by being untrue to one's convictions can be either wholesome or lasting. Yet the fear of departing from correct church usages has sometimes prevented artistic freedom. Musical feeling, so long as it be true, should not be stifled by church walls. The well-trained church musician need have no hesitation in giving his musical instincts full play. He will, of course, differentiate between the different styles of composition, and will not attempt to adorn a Purcell or Gibbons anthem with the same sort of expression as would be appropriate for one by Martin or Stainer. The constant development of *general* music has afforded more and more scope for different modes of expression, and the greater church composers have

not hesitated to adopt those modes into their compositions for the church. The best of them, however, have very properly excluded the over-dramatic element as being too highly charged with color and dynamics to be suitable for the services of the church. Excepting in the hands of men trained in *church style*, modern forms of expression are somewhat dangerous weapons.

The second class of men, described as "mere musical enthusiasts," need the restraining influence of a sound church training. Without it they are content to work on the feelings and emotions of the congregations by sensuous play of tone color, by operatic reminiscences, by bizarre manipulation of organ stops, by extreme transitions from fortissimi to pianissimi, by anything, in short, calculated to make a sensation. This false sentimentality passes in some quarters for expression. A worthy clergyman once lamented that his organist did not make the organ "pant and sigh." The phrase is a good one, and well describes the so-called expression which should find no support from church musicians.

The power to interpret is one of the rarest possessions of a musician, perhaps not less so than the genuine gift of composition itself. It is true, if the marks of expression are duly observed, one may rest secure in the conviction that he is well above the average. But what a vast region lies between the mere observance of the letter, and the proper appreciation of the spirit of a worthy art-work; it is possible to follow strictly every mark of expression, and yet entirely fail to secure true interpretation. It is manifestly impossible to print every desirable mark of expression; an attempt to do so would render the score unreadable. Therefore, not only should the ideas which the composer obviously intended be brought out, but also the many subtle and delicate effects which will suggest themselves

to each individual choir-master who seeks for them. And all without fuss. Cold, "four-square" interpretation is as much out of place in church as elsewhere, and the choir-master who is also a musician will allow his reason to preserve the balance between unrestrained sentiment on the one hand, and mere mechanical precision on the other. This is, perhaps, the best place to say that true expression demands something worth expressing.

We are surrounded on all sides by church composers, both English and American. The average English organist is far better trained, theoretically, than his American brother, but he often writes with a deadly dullness. So between English music that is learned and dull and American music that is pretty and trivial, there is not much to choose. Fortunately, choice is not dependent upon either kind. There is any amount of good music which is neither dull nor trivial. Neither is it necessary to go back exclusively to the old cathedral style, although many fine old anthems and services might be used to advantage. The wide gulf between the old, contrapuntal type of mathematical music and the modern emotional, palpitating school has been nobly bridged. The representative church composers, both English and American, have preserved the dignity and taste demanded by cathedral usage, and yet have taken advantage of the more modern forms of expression. These men have breathed new life into the old, pure forms. There is no longer any reason why the highest and best emotions of our nature should not be appealed to through the voice of the choir as well as through the words of the priest; the great leaders of church music have afforded us a noble instrument for the purpose. To accomplish this, however, proper interpretation is imperative.

CHAPTER XII

Interpretation — Expression (Continued)

In studying a choral composition, the first point to be observed is whether it be of a harmonic or contrapuntal nature, for upon this will depend the nature of the treatment required. The line of demarcation between these two styles is not, of course, impassable, and most good church composers of the present day do not hesitate to cross it at will.

Formerly, words and music bore comparatively little relation to each other, but now composers are going to the other extreme, and are endeavoring to paint the meaning of every word with fitting chordal color. Whether such tendency is making for real strength, or whether it may not lead to undue emotionalism in church music, is an important question, but not to be discussed at this time.

In the harmonic style the words must be more carefully studied than in the purely contrapuntal. Their relation to the various harmonies must be examined, and advantage taken of every opportunity which would give point to the text. The general sense should not be allowed to suffer by too much attention to single words. Broken phrasing and sentimental playing with the text will result. No accent should force either a word or a chord into disproportionate prominence. Yet sometimes a single word may be the medium of heightening expression, as in Gounod's "Come unto Him," where an accent on the word "plead" will greatly intensify the effect. A still better

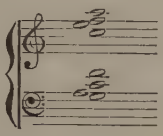
instance, because more subtle, is in Foster's "The souls of the righteous," where much may be suggested by a slight emphasis on the word "seemed" in the passage "In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die." This emphasis helps to bring out the thought that the death of the righteous is not really death, but sleep.

In order properly to express the words, it is often necessary to minimize the importance of the normal musical accents. The importance of rhythmic accentuation is by no means undervalued; underlying all exceptions there must always be felt a prevailing sense of natural rhythm. But no musical accent is of sufficient importance to warrant nonsense in the text, and whenever such accent would conflict with the sense of the words, it must be omitted. Variable accent is one of the most fertile means of expression, and will often emphasize the sense of the words as no ordinary accent could. The power of an accent will often be in proportion to its unusual character.

A fine instance of this is in Bach's "St. Matthew Passion" in the duet and chorus No. 33, "Behold, my Saviour now is taken," where, as the duet is proceeding with normal accentuation, the full chorus breaks in on the second, fourth, and after the first beats to the words "Leave Him, leave Him, bind Him not." The effect is overpowering, and is immensely enhanced because it is produced on the weak pulses of the measure.

The same principle holds good in regard to discords. The more unusual or dissonant they are, the more striking is their effect. And the more discordant they are, the more emphatic should be their accent. It would seem as if their discordant character demanded a compelling insistence to justify them. A good example of this may be found in Stainer's anthem, "And all the people saw," where appears, at the last use of the

words "in power and wrath He came," a so-called chord of the thirteenth, which contains each dissonance in the chord at once, only the third and fifth being absent; it stands thus:



Stainer wisely places before it *fff*.

Dynamics afford a potent medium for expression, but they should be used intelligently. Mysterious *pianissimos* do not necessarily suggest devotion, nor do boisterous *fortissimos* indicate spiritual grace. "I will sing with the understanding," said St. Paul, and we may well make the same resolution to-day. A fruitful source of misapplied expression is the association of certain phrases and words with specific forms of dynamic power. Any reference to "death," "night," "sorrow," "love," "Holy Ghost," etc., appears to be inseparable, in some minds, from whispering. Why should a thought so full of joy as "In death's dark vale I fear no ill, with Thee before to guide me," be always sung *pianissimo?* After expressing a "sure" belief that God's power "will lead me on o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent," why must it be considered expressive to diminish the tone on "till the night is gone"? Worse still, in the "Gloria" it is not uncommon to hear a sudden *piano* at the words "And to the Holy Ghost." Does not this somehow suggest that glory shall be given to the Father and to the Son, but a modified glory for the Holy Ghost? Such "expression" is almost irreverent.

Again, praise is naturally jubilant, yet, because it is irrevocably associated with power, many artistic and beautiful effects are lost. A case in point is in "Sleepers, wake," from St.

Paul. The word "Hallelujah" is set low for all the voices, especially the sopranos. Custom having ordained that Hallelujahs must be sung *forte*, this one, on account of the low pitch of the voices, is usually drowned by the organ. Here tradition may be ignored, and this "Hallelujah" sung *pianissimo*, with little or no organ. The celestial effect will be in distinct contrast to the following: "Awake! His kingdom is at hand," where the strong *crescendo* will be both dramatic and devotional.

CHAPTER XIII

Interpretation — Expression (Continued)

In the last chapter it was stated that the words bore less relation to the music in the contrapuntal, than in the harmonic, style. This can readily be seen by taking an extreme case, as, for instance, in the chorus of Handel: "And He shall purify the sons of Levi." The words here bear no relation whatever to the music, and the effect depends entirely on the strength of the part-writing.

In compositions of this class the chief factor in interpretation is a clear understanding of their construction, which understanding must be communicated to the choir. To do this, it will not be necessary to explain the mysteries of fugue and counterpoint in a technical manner. So long as the choir-master himself understands the structure of a contrapuntal chorus, a general explanation is all that is required, but it should be made in such a manner as to invest this style of writing with a new interest in the eyes of the singers.

Even in a fugal chorus, a concise, simple statement of its chief points may be given, and the choir will soon look for subject and answer, and the different developments in the shape of augmentation, diminution, inversion, and so forth. Thus a broader, more intelligent rendering will be possible, and yet without demanding from the singers special theoretical knowledge. The choir must not be allowed to use its knowledge thus gained too freely, or it may develop the habit of forcing into undue prominence an easily recognized subject, which would

defeat the idea of this form of writing, which seeks to give to no one part more importance than another. The choir-master must be the judge as to when a part rightly demands a special hearing; for instance, when a subject is being re-introduced, it may be announced with an increase of power, in which case it is customary to prepare for this effect by a *decrescendo* in the measure or measures immediately preceding it. When new subject-matter appears, it must be well defined, and the part in which it first appears made more prominent, the other parts following in order with corresponding power.

More musicianship is, perhaps, necessary to interpret the contrapuntal than the harmonic style. In the latter, verbal emphasis, striking chords, and emotional effect play an important part, but in the former each part must be studied, and its bearing on the other parts considered. No mere fanciful treatment of dramatic effects will here suffice, but all the various devices known to the contrapuntist must be sought in each part, and brought to light in performance.

The benefit to choirs which comes from the study of music of this type is immeasurable. The present-day choir, like the present-day congregation, is being spoiled by a surfeit of emotional, pseudo-dramatic church music, which alike vitiates true taste and retards the progress of pure singing. The lovely influence exerted on choir-singing by the best contrapuntal writing is increased to its fullest extent when no instrumental support is afforded. The dependence of choirs upon accompaniments is largely responsible for the deterioration of church-choir singing. One has but to examine the music of Palestrina, of the older English writers, or of the Russian Church, to realize the superb vocal equipment required to sing such works. Yet now, if a composer writes but a few lines without accompani-

ment, his wishes are rarely followed; and if they are, the result is anxiously awaited. So used have choirs become to an abnormal support that they are unreliable without it. The modern organ, supreme when used for its rightful purpose, tempts the player, by its very greatness, to give it an importance not warranted. It is generally used, not to supplement, but to assist the choir, to say nothing of its value as a smotherer of bad singing. This may seem strong, but let organists ask themselves how often they play, as they know it ought to be played, a light, florid accompaniment, such as begins on page 11 of Barnby's "King, all Glorious." If they are honest, they will not deny that they either register it to support the choir, or remake it altogether.

It must be admitted that this is a greater test of a choir's efficiency than singing an ordinary unaccompanied anthem of the part-song type. With no accompaniment, slight variations from the pitch, especially when they occur simultaneously through the parts, require a trained ear for detection, but a soft, delicate accompaniment inevitably reveals the smallest deviations to the most casual listener.

It cannot be too strongly urged that almost all rehearsing should be done with no instrumental support. So soon as the music is learned, no accompaniments which merely duplicate the vocal parts should be heard in the choir-room. Hymns, responses, psalms, and much anthem music will come under this head. Such practice, especially if it include faithful work of the old true church type, contrapuntal and perfect in form, will do more to increase the efficiency of our choirs than ten times the amount of practice sung to a grinding accompaniment. Steadiness, reliability, precision, indeed every attribute of good singing, will follow much more surely when singers learn to depend upon their own voices.

CHAPTER XIV

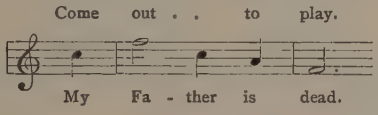
Interpretation — Expression (Continued)

The most subtle form of expression, and one that is ignored not only by church choirs, but by choruses generally, is that which is obtained by varying tone color. No solo singer's art would be considered complete without this last and highest mode of expression, and it is, therefore, all the more remarkable that choir-directors and conductors should pay no heed to the possibilities which it has in store for them also.

The first step towards obtaining tone color is the cultivation of imagination. This is less difficult with children than with people of maturer age, as the former are more susceptible and less conscious. Sometimes the simplest possible device will accomplish wonders. For instance, suppose more breadth is wished for a tone which is too thin. Instead of asking for a broader tone, which means nothing to children, ask them to sing as if filling with sound an arch made in the form of a half-circle, instead of through a narrow aperture. Unconsciously, a broader, rounder quality will follow. If a weak tone needs strengthening, describe a field, at the furthest end of which is a boy; let the choir sing out to him "Hullo, hullo; come home, come home." If still more power is required, say that the boy cannot hear, and they must call again. *No forcing of the voice, or bad tone, must be allowed; the true quality must be preserved in every gradation of power.* After the choir-master is satisfied that the distant boy has been made to hear, instantly change to another

sentence, an ordinary one which will call for no imagination, but on which the same power must be used. These, and similar devices will be found most useful as first aids to the imagination.

The plan suggested for studying vowel sounds by the aid of sentences should now be followed, but whereas in vowel practice the sentences were chosen for the vowels they contained, they must now be selected for the sentiments which they express. Choose two sentences or phrases containing totally different sentiments, and use them to the same music. Thus,



Tell the boys to try to portray in the tone of their voices the two ideas which the words convey. The result will astonish those who believe boys' voices to be colorless. Such sentences as "The sun is bright" and "The night is dark" will serve for further practice. It must not be forgotten that sentiments which may be used to advantage with older people would be out of place and useless with children. Such as "My heart is sad," "I weep for thee," "My love is false," should find no place in choir-rooms. A healthy, wholesome boy — and no others should be allowed in choirs — can find plenty of exercise for his imagination without premature suggestion of experiences which belong to later life. "My father is dead," does not come under this head, for it contains a truth with which too many boys are familiar.

A most effective color can be obtained to describe a solemn, sad, or helpless situation, by the use of a dark, somber, over-breathy tone quality. To describe it on paper is almost impossible, but it is comparatively easy to obtain. Make the boys

first imagine the situation by giving them a simple word-picture, then secure the tone by an undue quantity of breath, seemingly spread all over the chest and throat. At first the idea must be exaggerated, that the boys may thoroughly comprehend the result required. It can then be reduced to the quality desired. This especial tone color will provide dramatic intensity in such passages as "Without Thee all is dark;" "I have no guide," in Mendelssohn's "Hear my prayer;" or "The night is dark, and I am far from home," in Stainer's "Lead, kindly light." In this second example the effect is heightened by the sudden change to a bright, hopeful color on the phrase following "Lead Thou me on." The idea may be still further intensified in such a passage as "The grave gives up its dead, the seals are broken," from the chorus "Destroyed is Babylon" in Spohr's "Last Judgment." No choir-master having once heard the thrilling effect which this somber color produces in this last example will ever be content to allow his choir to enunciate these and other awe-inspiring phrases with the same tone which sings of peace, joy, hope, and faith.

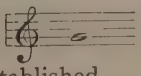
CHAPTER XV

Chanting

Directions for chanting are given in nearly all the pointed psalters now in use. A few practical suggestions, therefore, are all that will be given here.

Satisfactory chanting is the exception in America, because the average choir-boy is unable to attend more than sufficient rehearsals to prepare the set music. In England, where choir-schools flourish or where boys are drawn from parochial schools, the daily rehearsals and services eliminate chanting from the choir-master's consideration. It goes of itself. Here it becomes a serious problem.

There are comparatively few churches in America where the morning as well as the evening psalms are regularly sung at the Sunday services. The choral service is reserved for evensong, when the psalms are of necessity chanted.

Chanting will demoralize the vocal tone of a choir unless the greatest care be taken to overcome its bad effects. As far as possible, select chants which place the reciting note on a note above  at least until the vocal tone thereabouts is well established.

A satisfactory book is indispensable; otherwise good chanting is impossible. The writer especially commends to the notice of choir-masters that called the "Paragraph Cathedral Psalter." No psalter is perfect, but this is definite, practical, and easily understood. Instead of the usual bewildering accent

notes are printed over the syllables sung during the "initial" or "imaginary" bar, which lead naturally to the rhythmic part of the chant. Thus, almost all difficulty is removed except that of the recitation. But this is difficulty enough, for it is dependent primarily upon good reading, and good reading is a rare accomplishment, even amongst grown people. Many of the boys will have but recently learned to read at all. It is obvious that good reading must precede good chanting.

In studying a difficult or unfamiliar psalm, let each verse be *read* first, slowly and deliberately, and then chanted. This is a slow process, but a sure on .

Do not sing too fast. The jumble of words caused by a race between the Cantoris and Decani sides is neither reverent nor artistic. Insist on each syllable being heard, including the final "ed" of such words as "delivered." But avoid undue prominence to unimportant words or syllables.

Exclude unnecessary commas. Their use may be so constant as to prevent natural recitation. It will often be found sufficient to hold the breath for a scarcely perceptible moment, as after "come" in "O come let us sing." The comma in this particular place is frequently omitted altogether. It must *always* be omitted when it occurs in the rhythmical parts of the chant.

Always endeavor to join a smoothly read recitation to the strict time of the chant without any "pulling up." Make the change from the intoned reading to the measured music even and continuous. This is, perhaps, the most conspicuous fault in chanting. It is inexcusable.

Never allow one side to begin its verse until the other has finished. This absurd practice of "overlapping" is not as common as formerly, but should be entirely unknown. Cultivate in the choir, instead, an alert mental attitude which will

result in instant vocal response. To this end, the singers of one side should be taught to take breath whilst those on the other side are finishing their verse. Recognize the wisdom of singing *half* verses antiphonally. Study of the psalms will show that the meaning of them will, by this method, be brought out more effectually and the choir compelled to be ready and responsive.

Encourage soft chanting, both in church and at rehearsal. It will counteract the tendency to loss of pure tone, which much chanting induces.

At rehearsal, let individual boys, or two or three only, sing an occasional verse. It will rest the choir and reveal the weak spots in the chanting.

Study the spirit of the psalm or psalms to be sung. Many choirs chant everything on one dead level of tone and expression. Joyful, devotional, patriotic, historical, and penitential psalms receive the same general treatment. Sometimes one single chant will do duty for a song of thanksgiving and also for a lamentation. The wonderful poetry which is contained in this marvelous collection of psalms needs, indeed *demands*, something more than this. It is quite impossible, within the narrow bounds of chant music, to do complete justice to such exalted literature, but at least something may be done to render the union between words and music more vital than it so often appears to be now. Sometimes it may be by a change of chant, more often by vocal expression. When the sentiment changes frequently in one psalm it is unwise to alter the chant to each change, for this induces restlessness and lack of dignity. A study of Bishop Westcott's "Paragraph Psalter" will furnish scope for reflection on the best means of attaining expressive chanting. Many an obscure meaning will be brought to light,

after which no one will be content to race through the psalms with no apparent object but to reach the last verse.

Young organists should guard against undue realism in accompaniments to psalms. No good end is served in the endeavor to portray those who "grin like a dog, and run about through the city," nor in making the "birds sing amongst the branches" to the tune of a piccolo on the choir organ. Sometimes these inartistic feats reach the border-land of irreverence, as when, at the words "The Lord is great, and cannot worthily be praised," an organist who is noted for his transgressions in this direction, deliberately drew such amazing sounds from the organ as to suggest that he, at least, would see what he could do. Sane, churchly expression is needed in accompanying the psalms, no less than in other church music. A clever contrapuntist, so long as his art is not too apparent, can enhance the beauty of his playing immeasurably by judicious ornamentation, but it should not be overdone, or the result will be disturbing. Mere tricks of cheap dynamics should be sedulously avoided. They are only used by professional tricksters or by emotional amateurs.

CHAPTER XVI

Management of Choir Boys

Discipline is no longer maintained by the rod. Cathedral organists used to resort to physical punishment not only for breaches of deportment, but also for bad singing. The late Dr. Buck, of Norwich Cathedral, usually thrashed a boy for a poorly executed shake. Better teaching methods have consigned the rod to its rightful place amongst ancient armor and antique curios.

Boys are usually restless, nervous, excitable, and fun-loving; those not possessing these qualities rarely make good choristers. How to control the varied types which make up a choir is no light problem. That it is an important one becomes evident when it is considered that a choir-master's professional standing largely depends on the success with which he is able to impress his ideas and personality upon their young hearts and brains. Neither his musical knowledge, nor his skill as a voice trainer, will avail him, unless sufficient discipline can be maintained to carry out fully his wishes. Complete excellence in choir-training is dependent upon ready and willing obedience. Discipline, however, may be overdone. A man may rule his choir like a martinet, and thereby have it in such subjection to his will that it loses its spontaneity. A rod of iron held over singers may result in perfection of detail and adherence to mechanical forms of expression, but it will check freedom, feeling, and virility.

It is much easier to maintain discipline in school than in the choir-room. In school a regular, systematic routine is followed,

and the children recognize the fact that they go there to work. The choir-work, on the other hand, is regarded both by parents and children somewhat in the light of a diversion.

The golden rule for discipline may be stated in three words — waste no time. Most of the disturbance in choir-rooms is caused by unemployed minutes. The work for each rehearsal must be planned in advance, and all books and music distributed. Hymns and chants, the various details of the service, directions to the librarian, all must be decided upon before the actual work commences. No interruptions from visitors or friends should be encouraged during the practice hour, as tending to distract the attention of the boys. As far as possible, the systematic routine which obtains in the school should be followed. Each rehearsal should commence with vocal exercises; these should be followed by new anthem work, whilst the boys are most fresh and receptive; then hymns and psalter; and lastly the interpretative study of music which is more or less familiar to the singers. A consistent method of procedure is a strong factor in the control of children.

Another important point is gained when the work is made interesting. In a former chapter exercises were given to teach boys tone-and vowel-blending in a manner calculated to insure their attention. This principle of presenting work in an interesting manner should be carried into all work with children. No right-minded choir-master, however, will fail to recognize that certain parts of the work which deal with sacred things demand seriousness of treatment. Yet the same principle, though in a different phase, holds good. Children are just as responsive to sublime, solemn, or majestic situations as their elders, and, by a little forethought, all great truths of which they sing may be made to appeal to them in a fashion which

will enlist their sympathy and co-operation. But it must not be forgotten that a child cannot long be serious, and that the distance from the sublime to the ridiculous is but a short one. Without intention, and without conscious irreverence, children will suddenly descend from the highest altitude of thought of which they are capable to a most ridiculous plane of nonsense. The wise teacher will guard against this reaction by making the duration of the emotional tension as short as possible. This is not difficult in a rehearsal which comprises much varied work. Dramatic passages in anthems; special tone quality for unusual effects; exercises constructed from difficult florid passages in the music, — can all be utilized as aids in substituting cheerful work for drudgery.

Another successful device is the encouragement of a reasonable spirit of emulation. Between individual boys this might possibly engender jealousy, but between the Cantoris and Decani sides it is a great stimulus in the right direction. In most choirs one side excels the other; usually it contains the solo singers of each part. At rehearsals the two sides may be, as it were, pitted against each other in good-natured rivalry. This encourages the habit of *listening*, which necessitates attention. Thus both the singing and deportment are influenced.

It should be superfluous to advise against loss of temper at rehearsals. Yet it is not uncommon to hear of men who do lose control of themselves in this respect. The exhibition of temper is fatal to all discipline, yet the mere control of it is not sufficient. A right attitude of mind is necessary, which should be secured by preparation beforehand. The man who bustles into the rehearsal-room filled with other thoughts, who has not turned off the switch of his mind from previous duties of the day, is handicapped at the start. Before each rehearsal, time

should be allowed to obtain a proper mental atmosphere. A cheerful, optimistic frame of mind will do more to obtain order than a whole set of rules and regulations. Patience and tact, and the other attributes of a good disciplinarian, are greatly dependent upon this correct condition of mind. The persistent cultivation of it should be undertaken by every teacher.

Absolute fairness to each boy must of necessity prevail. There must be no discrimination, no favor to one at the expense of another. A boy who works well may, of course, receive commendation, but it must be so given as to indicate clearly that it has been earned. Fines once imposed should rarely be omitted, and never except for extra or exceptional work. The system of fines has little to recommend it, and may easily be carried to excess. The boys have an indefinable fancy that, in some mysterious fashion, the choir-master gains by their loss. Suspension for one or more Sundays with corresponding loss of pay is probably more salutary.

But better than fines and suspension is the encouragement of a spirit of pride in the choir, and responsibility for its good name. The office of the chorister, of whatever age, should be magnified. Each member should be made to feel that he, individually, has the honor of the choir to maintain. Choristers do not always realize this. They are treated too much as a combination of musical (or unmusical) instruments utilized to further our ideas. This is well, so far as it goes. But, in proportion to the spirit of interest, to the sense of responsibility, to the pride in the work, which we are able to impart to our singers, so will the devotional and artistic result be increased and strengthened. No boy is too young to come under these influences, the development of which will render ordinary methods of discipline unnecessary and useless.

CHAPTER XVII

Concluding Notes

Make frequent opportunities of hearing other choirs; emulate their good points, and avoid the bad.

Get a substitute at the organ, and listen to an occasional service by your choir from the pews. You will hear things you never heard before, and may possibly find a reason for criticism which you have thought to be unjust.

Should anything go wrong during service (and, despite your best efforts, you must expect it occasionally), do not allow your countenance or actions to advertise the fact.

If you must throw up your hands, or make other gesticulations, do so in the choir-room. Gymnastic exhibitions in church are out of place. If the singers are properly prepared, such contortions are unnecessary; if not, they are useless.

When adverse criticism comes, after getting sufficiently angry sit down quietly and think; you may discover that there was more justification for the criticism than for the anger.

Judicious criticism is wholesome, and never more salutary than when directed by yourself to your own work.

Look after details; a well-sung anthem is no excuse for a slovenly "Amen."

Do not expect that an artistic temperament will justify idiosyncrasies of conduct. The time has passed when a man's genius excused him for making a fool of himself. The phrase "eccentricities of genius" is now generally, and correctly, translated "bad manners."

Do not be so bound up in church music that you fail to appreciate other schools. Hear symphony, oratorio, and chamber-music concerts, and graft the artistic spirit which should be present in them on to your own work. Be careful, however, not to introduce anything foreign to correct church style.

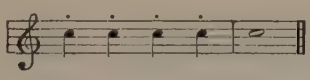
As far as possible, take your opera nights, theater parties, and social late suppers on some other evening than Saturday. Tired bodies and nerves are poor servants for the Sunday duties of an organist.

Remember that church music is less advanced in America than other branches of musical art. You must, therefore, do your share towards its advancement.

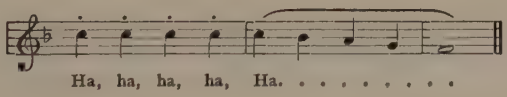
When you lose your enthusiasm, resign, for, whether old or young, you will be musically paralyzed.

ADDITIONAL EXERCISES

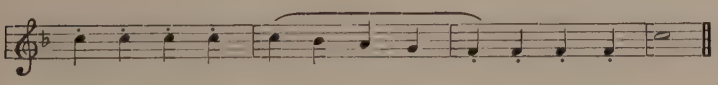
The following exercises must be regarded as supplemental to those contained in the body of the book.

As without good attack there can be no satisfactory singing, the author has constructed a few exercises founded on the well-known example given by Behnke

They must be transposed into all keys within proper range.

1

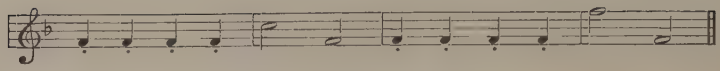


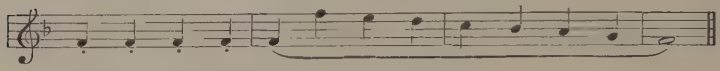
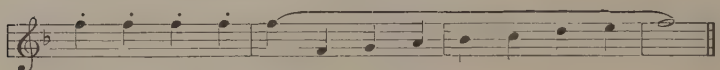
For attack and blend.

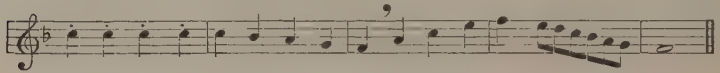
2

The interval of the fifth must be accurate.

3

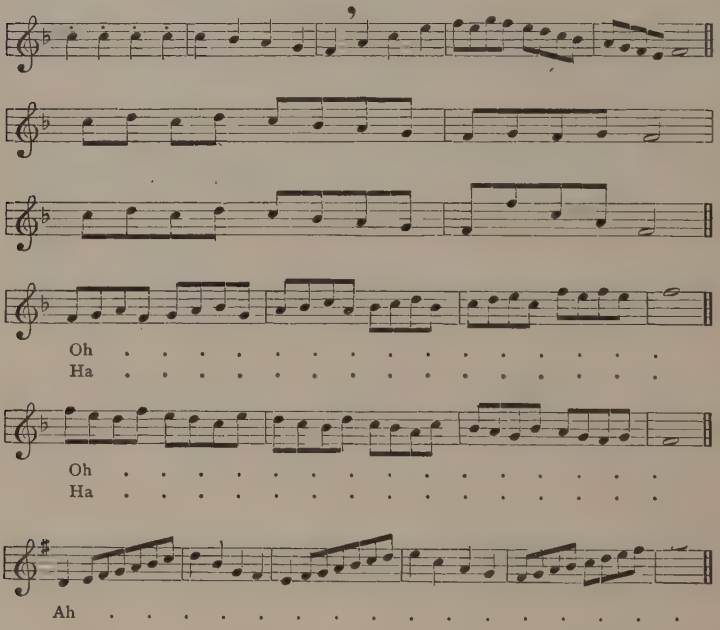
To be practiced on even tone, also with cres. and dim.



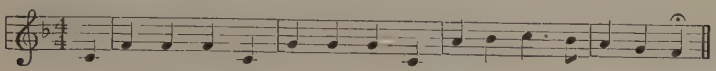
To prevent "scooping" for a high note.





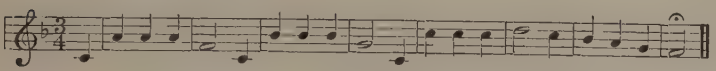
To be taken in two breaths, and also in one.



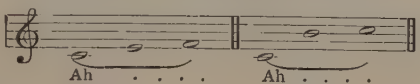
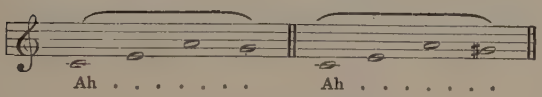
For loosening the jaws. See that jaw moves up and down.



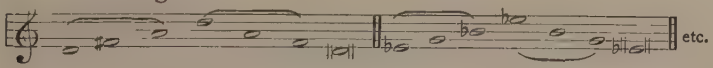
To "No" and "Nah."



To "No" and "Nah."

To induce correct pitch. To be sung slowly.



For smoothing tone.

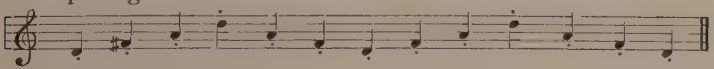


Th is should be sung in three forms :

1st. Hum up and down softly — thinking closed vowels.

2d. Hum up; open on top note to "Moh" — carry down legato.

3d. Staccato up; descend as in No. 2.

For opening the tone.

4th. Staccato "Ha ha"

See that the "ha" merges toward "haw."

These exercises, combined with those given throughout the book, if used correctly and regularly, are practically all that a boy need study. For advanced florid work, nothing can be finer than certain "runs" from oratorio choruses, as in "For unto us," Handel; "Awake the harp," Haydn; Handel's great song "Let the bright seraphim" is excellent practice, sung in unison by all the boys. Serviceable material for two sets of sopranos may be found in Wesley's "Wilderness," Gibbon's "Hosannah," Boyce's "O where shall wisdom be found," and other music of the strict cathedral type.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the first and last thing to be considered in exercises is not so much what they are as how they are used.

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